

Amelia Earhart

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She used to say, laughing gaily:

"I haven't the courage to tell people my plans in advance. A pilot shouldn't worry and if I listened to every prediction I'd probably never leave the ground."

It is not generally known that forecasters predicted accidents on two of Amelia Earhart's successful ocean flights—or that several astrologers begged her not to fly on March 20th in 1937, the day her plane was smashed on a take-off from Honolulu.

Despite his willingness and feverish anxiety to leave nothing to chance, George Putnam found little or nothing tangible in the first rush of letters from eager writers. He was ready to be shown, but there was heartbreaking confusion and disparity in every batch of mail. Late in July, however, occurred the first of several remarkable events. That morning Mr. Putnam received the following telegram from Hamilton, Ontario:

AMELIA EARHART ALIVE ON CORAL SHOAL ON ONE OF GILBERT ISLANDS LATITUDE 2 ABOVE EQUATOR 174 LONGITUDE. THIS MESSAGED RECEIVED BY MR. L—NEW YORK MEDIUM.

Mr. Putnam made a note of the position, intending to check it later on his maps, and filed the telegram away. An hour or so later, when the morning mail was delivered, there came a brief but pleasant note from Captain T—M— of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Mr. Putnam eventually came to it, in the monotonous process of routine, and began reading:

"... I am the retired captain of a copra boat that used to trade in the South Seas. I just happened to remember an uncharted island that we frequently visited for turtle eggs. The Gilbertese natives know where it is, too. The island is at—"

George Putnam was suddenly out of his office chair, yelling for his son.

"Dave! Oh, Dave!"

David Putnam came, running.

"Trouble, Dad?"

"No. Listen, Dave, get me the telegram that came this morning from Ontario, Canada. The one about the island near the Gilberts."

David fetched it, and he and his father nervously compared the latitude and longitude with that give in Captain M—'s letter. *They were exactly the same!* The retired skipper's letter, however, gave a more detailed location—174 degrees 10 minutes east longitude, 2 degrees 36 minutes north latitude. A hasty examination of a huge map located the spot, roughly about 85 miles from Tarawa island.

Urgent telegrams were rushed to the Ontario medium and to Captain M—, asking further details. Suitcases were packed for a swift trip to New York. The telephone wires throbbed with calls

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to navigation authorities, Government officials, explorers, seasoned travelers—anyone who might have come upon that tiny dot of land in their wanderings.

Two days later, in New York, George Putnam knew in his heart that he must have that island searched. And finally, through the cooperation of Sumner Welles, Under-Secretary of State, the transatlantic cables to London pulsed with Mr. Putnam's plea. The British authorities agreed to communicate with their consul in the distant outpost and a search was arranged—at Mr. Putnam's expense.

A vessel put out from Makin Island, skimmed through uncharted lanes and soon came to 174 east longitude, 2 degrees north latitude.

But the island had vanished. The searching crew checked and re-checked their bearings. They poured over maps, took soundings, and cruised around the spot for two days. But there was no land within 20 miles, there wasn't one single clew to indicate what might have happened to that uncharted speck of earth. And the island has not been found to this day.

Captain M— and former members of his crew, all reliable seamen, swore they had been to the island half a dozen times. Even the log of the copra ship confirmed their tale. The only possible explanation to the mystery—if it is that—is that the island was swallowed by some submarine upheaval of volcanic origin. Was Amelia Earhart driven to that isolated isle for refuge—and sucked under when it plunged beneath the sea? Who knows? The episode had only one weird sequel—baffled admission from the Ontario medium that he was never again able to contact Amelia Earhart on the island where he had last heard her voice. And, just as a statistical reference, that expedition cost George Putnam \$1,000.

While Putnam was in New York late that summer, stopping at the Barclay Hotel, he was approached by numerous persons who offered to sell him information concerning his missing wife's whereabouts. One man, Wilbur Rothar, a Bronx janitor, actually claimed he had found Miss Earhart on a South Seas island, and attempted to extort \$2,000 from Putnam. He was trapped by Department of Justice agents, found insane by a board of alienists and sent to an asylum for life.

(To be concluded in next issue)